

Central MRS Meeting Notes
June 20, 2007
Randolph County DSS

Counties Present: Chatham, Davidson, Guilford, Lee, Mecklenburg, Randolph, Rockingham, Stanly

Introductions

News from Raleigh

Automation

MRS Institute Review

Recap Policy Discussion

Substance Abuse

When, How, Who

Tools

News from Raleigh

Evaluation Issues

- Heather asked people to be on the lookout for a Dear County Director letter within a week or two regarding data collection around Social Worker visits with Children in Foster Care.
- There is a federal mandate that we track these visits and how many of them take place in the child's residence.
- The decision has been made to track this through the MRS database. We will want it on all children in care as of July 1 of this year. This may require that counties go back and enter some older 210 information since the system will not allow 109 data to be entered for children until after the 210 information is entered.
- In addition to the DCD there will be an Administrative Letter that deals with this and the other recent updates to the MRS database. For more information after reading the letter they can contact Heather.

MRS Institute – August 27-29 Asheville

- Hoping to have the brochure and registration come out this week.
- There will be sessions on Shared Parenting and Maintaining Connections in Foster Care, Cultural Diversity, Coaching Families, Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence (one of which will deal with how to work with offenders), Case Plans (how to develop them in CFTs) and how to use them with families, engagement: community partners, families, and staff, Combined WF and CPS case plans, relative care and working with relative caregivers, WF 101 for CPS workers, CPS 101 for WF workers, WF and CPS collaboration, working on an ethics presentation, Documentation, one from a county talking about how they implemented DV policy, Financial Social Work (talking to CPS families about money issues).
- Day long seminars on Latino simulation, Poverty simulation, CFTs, Collaboration with CPS and WF.
- From DSS staff trainers: Solution focused therapy, SOC, True Colors (Joanne Scaturro), Humor in the Workplace.
- George Duvall – former foster child that will do a session on fatherhood.
- Quan Bryant – presented at the WF Conference.
- John Formica – time and stress management.

- These will be presented by Staff Development, Counties, University Partners, and nationally known speakers.

Recap of Policy Discussion from last month

Last month we talked about a lot of policy. When we rolled MRS into Chapter 8 and realized there were some areas there were some areas that needed clarification. Asked people for input at all three meetings last month. The following is a summary of the meetings as a whole. (New conversations from this meeting also included.)

When we seek input at these meetings, Holly writes a summary of the discussion and the policy team will take it into account when they discuss

Stopping Family Assessments

- The biggest thing that came out of this was that this was a policy that was very rarely used.
- Doing a good job at intake is important; it was possible that this policy was used in circumstances where if intake were tighter the report would not have been accepted in the first place.
- Discussed back and forth reporting from separated and divorcing parents. Some counties have used CFTs to deal with this because the policy is not appropriate for these types of reports.
- Question about would you complete a 5104 and Case Decision Summary if you stopped the assessment.
- Felt that using this did not give a family closure.
- Hard to feel 100% confident that it was ok to use this policy.

CFTs – is the policy clear? Is it enough?

- Perhaps some policy on how to document (counties say they are doing them but we do not see documentation of them.)
- Need to include CFT information in Foster Care policy.
- Need to strengthen the policy about actually doing the service plan at the CFT.
- When it is appropriate to collapse CFT and P-PAT.
- Pre-petition CFT – would this place children at risk – want to make sure that we protect children but don't have policy that allows staff to claim a safety threat and therefore not hold CFT.

New Discussion at this Meeting

- Would be interesting to track what counties have CFTs before bringing children into care and those who don't and see if there is a relationship between rates of children in care and holding CFTs prior to bringing children into care.
- Guilford has been holding pre-petition CFTs for some time and is sure that they reduce placement. If you have all the resources at the CFT you have the most options for placement prevention.
 - They have looked at their own data and at CFT meetings where the child was present, there were no placements, but when they were not there was likely to be a placement. Same with fathers – when they were there placements were less likely to happen. This is only preliminary on 3 months of data, but they will continue to track it.

- Betty was just at a meeting where one of the presentations was on fathers who had been involved with Child Welfare and they said they had been treated very poorly. Often times even when the parents were married, the social workers did not want to work with the fathers. They said the system was clearly not designed with fathers in mind, and that we need to reconsider how we interact with them.
- If we want Dad to be responsible, don't we have an obligation to include him?
- Nicole said looking at the relationship between pre-placement CFTs and children in care would be easy to do, and could be included on the Fact Sheet as long as people are using the 5106 and recording the CFTs.

CFSR issues

- 210 policy is clear that you have to contact the father during the assessment, but it is not clear what has to happen after that. At the CFSR the feds were clear that they expected him to be involved throughout the case. Or at least for the DSS to make every reasonable effort to include him or his family.
- At all three meetings someone said that we would put mom in danger if we involved dad. There are certainly cases where that is true, but most of the time there is evidence already existing that he is dangerous if that is the case (police reports, etc). If it is true, document it, but we need to be sure that we are not using this as an excuse not to involve the other parent. Custodial parents may have their own agenda in not wanting the other parent involved.
- Even though the absent parent themselves may not be an appropriate placement, but some of their extended family may be. Don't overlook these resources.

Shared Parenting

- First thing that needs to happen is to get this into Chapter 4 because it is not there yet.
- Since this meeting is supposed to happen within 7 days, usually the assessor or 215 worker still has the case because they are not always transferred that fast.
- Blended teams was pointed out as a good strategy for dealing with this issue so that the foster care worker had already been hearing about these cases so it was not brand new to them when the child came into care. Also, since the mindset of blended teams is that they cover for each other, the parent may have seen the foster care worker at some point in the life of the case management (foster care worker may have done a home visit to cover for the case management worker or something like that)

New Discussion at this Meeting

- Often the foster care workers are the best resources in a team decision meeting before taking a child into care. They have access to a lot of resources (and they don't want another case if they can avoid it!). Don't think that just because they are a part of the meeting that it means you are necessarily planning to take the child into care.
- Sometimes there are older children who parents may not fight as hard to keep custody of as with younger children (delinquent teens). Let the parents clearly know that once they allow custody, they lose all control over decisions but

they are not off the hook, they will still pay child support, etc. Present to them that they can work with all these services voluntarily through a 215 worker who will allow more participation and ownership of the case by the parent, or they can have them court ordered.

- If you have 2 siblings with different dads and one child goes to live with his dad, who is an appropriate placement, and the other child has to go into Foster Care, how do you handle that case? Do you split the case? This is difficult for the family if you do that. (Randolph asked this)
 - Mecklenburg – some districts split some do not. If they don't split, sometimes the 109 worker handles the case, and sometimes the 215 worker carries it.
 - Stanley – has the foster care worker carry the whole case
 - Guilford – has the foster care worker carry the whole case
 - Rockingham – has only had this one time, and the case was split because of the circumstances of the particular case
 - Davidson – has the foster care worker carry the whole case
 - Chatham – one worker – they have a blended team though

Services Recommended

- Really need clarification with which cases are Recommended and which ones are Provided
- Need clarification what to call it if you are recommending that they continue a service that was already in place.
 - Asked what people would do here? Most people said they would make it Services Recommended and one said it was No Services because the family was already doing it, so it was not a recommendation of DSS. However one county said they were not comfortable with that because No Services might imply that DSS did not think they needed counseling. Kept it in the record that they recommended it.
- Clarification on the 7 day visit – how are they getting the services you recommended? CFSR said we might need to help and support them a little to get those services in place. Need to document what you did when you talked with the family about the services.

Safe Surrender

- All of the ads imply that there will be no repercussions but the difference is *legal* repercussions, we will still do TPR. Just because they don't *have* to give their name does not mean we won't ask.
- Probably need to clarify to what extent we will go to find out who the parents are.

Re-examining the Risk Assessment tools

- We are doing this but it is a slow process.
- Looking at what it would take to have a set of risk assessment tools done specifically for North Carolina.

Substance Abuse Issues

You have to report where an issue is substance abuse. What do we do, when do we ask parents to take drug screens, and to use substance abuse assessments – what triggers that?

- If the parent admits that they use drugs to a level that affects the children the worker will ask them to complete assessments. Also if they appear to be high.
- Only if it can be shown that the level of the substance use is affecting the safety of the children.
- Substance abuse assessments are useless if the parent or social worker does not have enough information to give the therapist.
- Holly said that the feeling is that we are doing too many of these – using them as a CYA tool. Some counties agree that it is a CYA issue.
- Drug use does not equal child neglect and people need to understand that! We are not the moral police, or law enforcement.
- If the parent denies that they are using drugs, does not it make sense to ask them to take a drug test before you send them to a substance assessment?
 - Yes, but you can only request that they do that, and cannot coerce them to do it. Cannot do a drug screen just because or as standard procedure.
- Consider the age of the child when determining if the level of use is affecting the child.
- Mecklenburg has some families that are recommended for substance use education (not as severe as mandatory treatment) however it is \$250 and the county cannot pay this for every family that can't pay for it themselves. How do we get those families those services?
 - Going to have to look to the communities to ask how they can help with people who are not to the level of mandatory treatment but could use some education as well as those who are seeking it out?
 - NA and AA are in every community and they are free. People might have to sit through several meetings to 'get it' but it won't cost anything.

Tools

- Two years ago we made a CD that was compiled of tools that counties provided. We cannot put them on the MRS website, but the Director's Association will put them on their website.
- Want to update this information on the Director's Association website.
- Directors Association website = www.ncacdss.org
- Some of the things people have asked Holly for:
 - CFT brochure, checklist for documentation
 - WF referral form
 - Letter templates
 - Diligent efforts

CFSR PIP Update

- There are 5 subcommittees that are meeting.
 - Child & Family Involvement, Court Involvement, Cultural Competency, Accountability, Interagency Collaboration.
- We have not gotten our written report back from the feds yet (although we know what the issues are).
- The Documentation workgroup that pre-dates the CFSR has also come up with a template that they will be asking counties to pilot.

Things we are thinking of for future meetings

- Having folks hear from the trainers as to what is required when for workers.
- Domestic Violence folks talk about these issues – how you work with the offender, what if both parents want to come to CFTs together.
- Other ideas? Send to Holly.

Future Meetings:

Central: July 16 Davie County Mocksville Library

Eastern: July 18 Edgecombe County

August: No Meetings due to the Institute